

Government urgently needs to gauge public perception of new track and trace app

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Governments urgently need to understand public priorities before they roll out track and trace, according to new research.

One of the earliest studies to look at mass acceptance of tracing apps suggests that privacy—the factor generally considered most important by governments in their approach to the new technology—is the top consideration for only a certain group of people. Others would place greater weighting on other considerations, such as how convenient it would be to use. Promoting the wider societal benefits of an app is also proven more effective than focusing on benefits to a user's own health—suggesting governments should focus on citizens' altruistic motives.

The different approaches and perceptions of apps means that the UK as a whole may not engage with the track and trace system being introduced in autumn in the same way, so the [government](#) may quickly need to gauge 'what' we all are thinking, before the design is finalised.

Professor Monideepa Tarafdar from Lancaster University Management School is one of the authors of the new study, published in the *European Journal of Information Systems*. She said: "More than half of the population must install and actively use the app in order for it to be effective. In light of the urgency of the situation, and the fact the government will roll it out voluntarily, getting a true understanding of how to get the masses to accept—and crucially, use—one single app, is the most important consideration for developers.

"Our study reveals that one app simply cannot fit all—so the government needs to understand what the majority of us think about the system in order for it to be successful."

The researchers led an experimental study in Germany with 518 participants in April 2020, when a track and trace app had been announced by government, but before it was released. They presented different versions of a fictitious app to the individual participants, gauging responses to functionality and design. Results revealed that participants could be divided into three groups—Critics, the Undecided and Advocates - each with differing propensities to use the app, and each valuing the app features very differently.

Professor Simon Trang from the University of Goettingen said: "For the critics and undecided amongst participants, privacy was a top consideration—but did not sway the advocates of a tracing app. Crucially, we found messaging around the app protecting the user's own health were either ineffective or, in some cases, counterproductive. To achieve mass acceptance, our results suggest that communication strategies should solely focus on societal benefits such as 'download the app and help to keep the population safe.' "

Participants that were undecided were more swayed to download and use the app if it was presented as something convenient to use, whereas this was not a strong consideration for other groups.

The paper, 'One app to trace them all? Examining app specifications for mass acceptance of contact-tracing apps' written by academics from the University of Goettingen, Lancaster University, Hong Kong Baptist University and Alfaisal University, is published in the *European Journal of Information Systems*.

More information: Simon Trang et al, One app to trace them all?

Examining app specifications for mass acceptance of contact-tracing apps, *European Journal of Information Systems* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/0960085X.2020.1784046](https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2020.1784046)

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